

VZCZCXYZ1824
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHYN #2259/01 3561006
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 221006Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3437
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0151

S E C R E T SANAA 002259

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR MACDONALD AND INR JYAPHE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2019

TAGS: PREL MOPS PTER YM

SUBJECT: ROYG MAKES THE ROUNDS IN EUROPE: ATTEMPTS TO STAVE OFF FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN SA'ADA

REF: SANAA 2205

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Deputy Foreign Minister Muhi al-Dhabbi recently returned from a whirlwind trip to six European nations in which he attempted to explain ROYG policy on the Houthi conflict in Sa'ada and postpone rumored UN Security Council debate that the ROYG fears might lead to greater foreign intervention in the conflict. During a December 21 meeting with the Ambassador, Dhabbi took a somewhat dim view of Saudi Arabia's military involvement, noting it has not led to a decisive upper hand and may be inviting harmful Iranian interference and a sharpened Shi'a-Sunni rhetoric, an element absent from previous rounds of the conflict. Concerned that growing international attention to the humanitarian and security situation in Sa'ada may lead to a "regionalization" of the conflict and interference in Yemen's internal affairs, the ROYG is deploying its diplomatic resources in order to clarify its goals and assuage fears that Saleh is on a quest to eradicate the Houthis rather than a genuine search for reconciliation. However, the ROYG seems determined to pursue military operations in Sa'ada until it is convinced that the Houthis have been sufficiently weakened and will) with nowhere else to turn) lay down their arms and capitulate to the ROYG's terms for a ceasefire. END SUMMARY.

"MILITARY PRESSURE A MUST"

¶2. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Muhi al-Dhabbi, in a meeting with the Ambassador on December 21 discussed the Sa'ada conflict and his recent visit to Europe in the hopes of clarifying the ROYG's goals and point-of-view with regard to the Houthis. Dhabbi said that he recognizes that the ongoing Sa'ada conflict will require more than a simple military solution, but that military pressure is required in order to ensure that the Houthis will "come to the negotiating table with sincerity." He said that the past attempts at negotiation between the ROYG and the Houthis failed because the Houthis failed to provide assurances to the ROYG that they would lay down their weapons and relinquish the mountainous high-ground they've secured in the many rounds of war. "What guarantees do we have from the Houthis that all conditions would apply if we stop the war?" Dhabbi said. Ultimately, Dhabbi agreed that there must be a political solution to the conflict when the dust settles and that the ROYG would even agree to the Houthis having a political party of their own within the larger political structure, but that "the only possibility is continued pressure" until the time was ripe for negotiation.

"NOT A WAR OF CHOICE"

¶3. (S) According to Dhabbi, the ROYG believes that it has no other option but to continue to engage in this war with the Houthis, lest the Houthis or any other disgruntled faction perceive the ROYG as a weak entity. Dhabbi repeatedly described Saleh as a man of peace and reconciliation, not a war-monger, but one whose hand has been forced by a rebellion that would tear the country apart left unchecked. Dhabbi described the Sa'ada war as "a real challenge that we must not let go unaddressed, not a battle of choice." He also argued that Yemen has spent most of its history in a fractured state and that the young unity the country enjoys now could fall apart if the tribes sense the central government is weak. Citing the December 17 counterterrorism operations, Dhabbi said, "these operations sent a message that the central government is strong enough to deal with two military issues at once." (COMMENT: Dhabbi believes that the successes of the ROYG in the CT operations of December 17 communicated to the Houthis and the southern separatists, as well as AQAP, that the ROYG is in command of the country and not to be challenged. END COMMENT.)

DANGERS OF REGIONALIZING THE SA'ADA CONFLICT

¶4. (C) Dhabbi noted that he recently returned from an eight-day, six-country tour of Europe in which he discouraged unwelcome foreign attention to the Houthi conflict) particularly in the form of U.N. Security Council debate and, possibly, a resolution) arguing that further regionalization of the conflict will just prolong the tensions and draw other actors into the fray. (NOTE: Dhabbi's mission likely was prompted by reports that some

European countries (e.g. the U.K.) were leaning towards bringing the Sa'ada issue before the UNSC for debate. END NOTE.) He also shared with the Ambassador the key message which he tried to impress upon European powers: the Saudi-Yemeni cooperation in Sa'ada is not aimed at wiping out the Houthis, but instead is focused on protecting the governments' mutual security. Dhabbi agreed that Saudi military assistance has not proven decisive and that it has invited greater interest from Iran and a sharpened religious rhetoric heretofore absent (reftel). Dhabbi urged restraint and patience from European and regional partners; arguing that if they really wanted to help, they should "join hands" with the ROYG to pressure the Houthis to lay down their arms and come to the negotiating table.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Due to continuing pressure from the international community to end the crisis in Sa'ada and engage in some form of mediation with the Houthis, the ROYG has deployed its diplomatic resources to urge non-intervention in its internal affairs. While accepting Saudi military collaboration, the ROYG has argued that any other form of foreign intervention or mediation) whether by Iran, partner nations, or the UN Security Council) would be an unwelcome gesture and would only exacerbate the problem. Though some members of the ROYG recognize the need for political reconciliation with the Houthis, the full thrust of Yemeni policy will continue in the form of military pressure until the ROYG determines that the Houthis have been sufficiently weakened to accept ROYG terms for a ceasefire. END COMMENT.

BRYAN